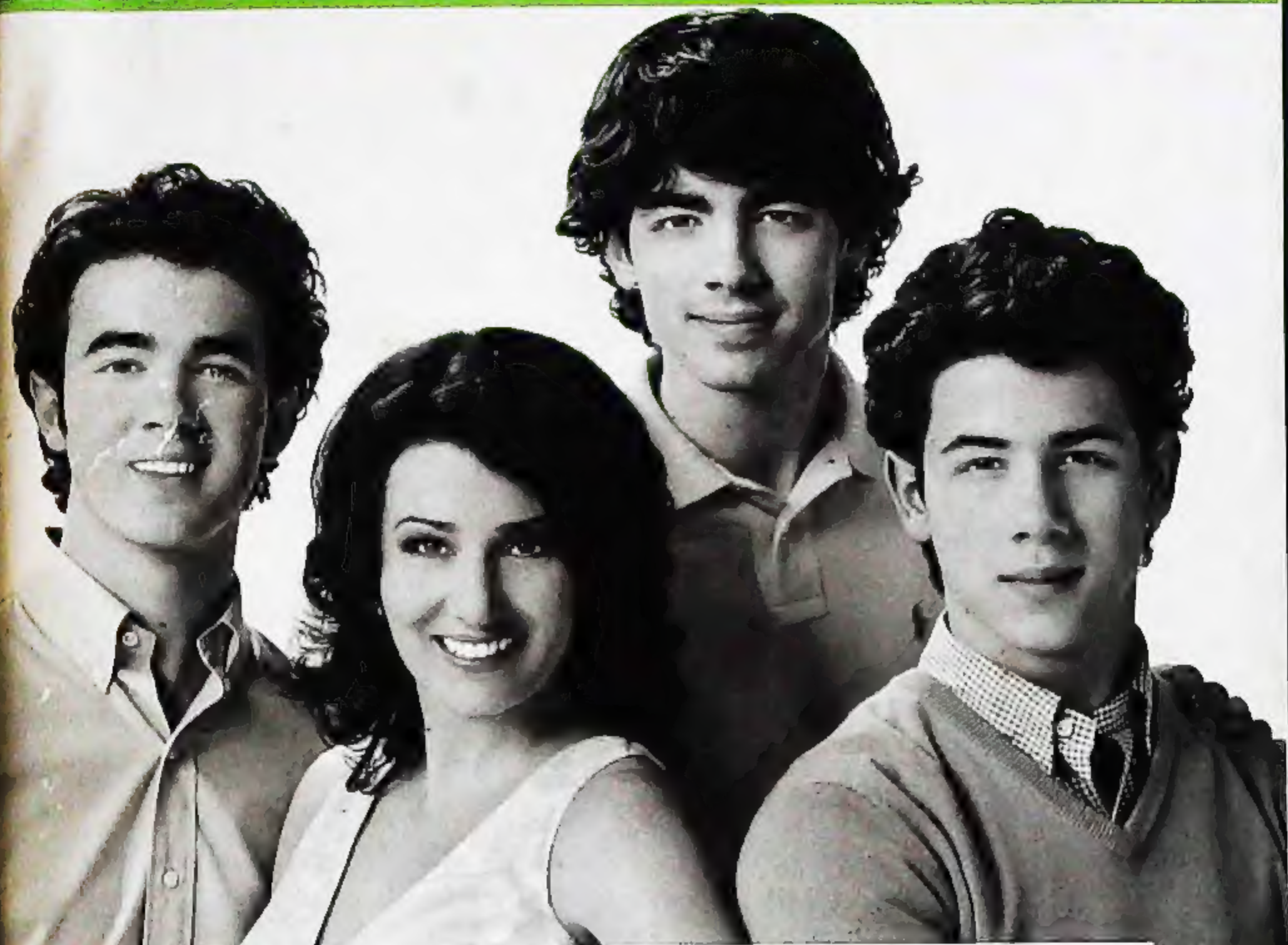


LARGE PRINT

MAY 2010

Guideposts

TRUE STORIES OF HOPE AND INSPIRATION



DENISE JONAS

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Behind the Brothers**

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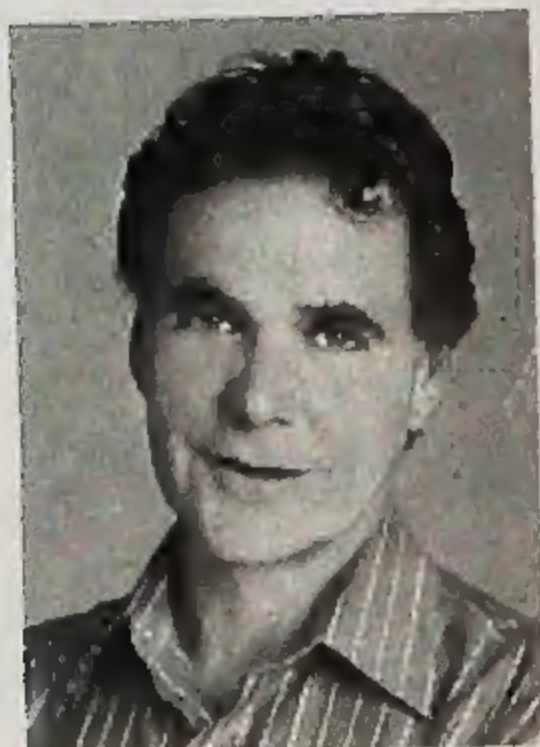
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MAY 2010

Editor's Note

A Wonderful Evening



Edward Grinnan

My mother died April 19, 1999, so all I have on Mother's Day are memories. But that is not a bad thing. Good mothers leave good memories. Estelle Grinnan left a lot.

Most of them are funny. She loved to visit me in New York from Michigan. We always caught a show and had dinner at La Bonne Soupe on West 55th. This particular time we saw a long dramatic play. During the last act Mom kicked off her shoes. Bad decision. When the curtain came down Mom couldn't get her right foot back into her shoe due to her swollen arthritic bunion. The reason came clear outside the theater: A hard autumn rain was falling. "The weather always does this to my toe,"

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Mom said, without a hint of complaint.

There were, of course, no cabs to be had. I explained to Mom we'd have to wait for the crowds to clear. Not Mom. In her seven decades on earth, patience had not become one of her virtues. She wanted to get back to her hotel, the St. Moritz. It was where she always stayed, ever since she won a trip to New York back in the fifties on a national TV quiz show. Of course there was no stopping her. We hiked up Seventh Avenue in a midnight monsoon. People were staring and no doubt wondering, "What kind of son marches his mother barefoot through the streets of Manhattan in a monsoon? Shouldn't he just wait for a cab?"

We were soaked to the bone by the time we got to the hotel, and I was relieved to be inside. Not that my mother cared at all. She turned, gave me a hug and said, "Thanks for the wonderful evening."

And she meant it.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Edward Grinnan". The signature is fluid and stylized, with a long horizontal line extending from the end.

What's new on

NEW BEGINNINGS

↪ Late Bloomer

David Gary didn't let muscular dystrophy stop him. After retirement, he found volunteer work and a hobby that turned his life around (page 38). Take a tour of his gorgeous wheelchair-accessible garden at **guideposts.com/davidgary**.

WEB EXCLUSIVE!

↪ Join the Circle of Inspiration

As a member of the *Circle of Inspiration* you'll receive a behind-the-scenes video peek of the magazine each month, a front-row seat to online events, discounts on books of up to 25% and much more! Sign up at **guideposts.com/circleofinspiration**.

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ANIMALS AND HEALING

↪ Eternal Companions

Former Guideposts staffer Ptolemy Tompkins is back with a heartwarming story about his dog Mercury (page 30). Go online and watch him talk about his animal dreams and whether pets go to heaven. It's all at **guideposts.com/tompkins**.

WEB EXCLUSIVE!

↪ We ♥ Mom

Hear Guideposts staffers share their favorite memories of their moms. Plus, hear StoryCorps family remembrances of mothers who inspired, nurtured, sacrificed for and supported their children—all at **guideposts.com/mothersday**.

pass it on

PEOPLE HELPING PEOPLE

Remembered

Soon after I got my driver's license, Mom asked me to give her a ride to the cemetery. "I want to take flowers to your grandparents' grave," she said. Mom liked to use silk flowers. They always looked great and lasted longer than fresh ones.

She knelt at her parents' headstone and removed the faded blooms from her last visit. Rather than throw them away, she instructed me to place them on graves whose sites were bare. Every few months Mom would ask me for another ride.

She and I continue the tradition today with help from my neighbors. They give me their gently used silk flowers and we take them to the cemeteries by our homes. I've started to place them on the graves of veterans from long-ago wars too. It's a simple, inexpensive way to remember those the rest of the world may have forgotten.

**—Virginia Moreno
COLUMBUS, TEXAS**

the up side®

QUOTES FROM TODAY'S POSITIVE THINKERS

"My children are my life.... It's not like I don't have my own wants and dreams anymore—it's just that the kids come first. It's primal."

—Angie Harmon, actress and mother of three (read her story at guideposts.com/angieharmon)

"Do something today that reflects who you are, what you are capable of, what you care about. Give yourself plenty of evidence of what you can do, and you will not doubt your abilities to do anything."

—David Niven, Ph.D., from his book *Simple Secrets for Becoming Healthy, Wealthy and Wise: What Scientists Have Learned and How You Can Use It*

➔ For more uplifting quotes, go to **guideposts.com**

Stop, Eat, **PRAY**

**How this ex-trucker
keeps on truckin'**

By Joe Hunter JACKSON, GEORGIA

Swing by the T/A truck stop off I-75 in Jackson, Georgia, and you'll see a food court, gas pumps and rows of big rigs in the parking lot. But then a peaceful song catches your ear and you follow it to a bright neon cross and a tractor trailer with "Truckers Chapel" in big letters across the side. Open the door and you see a dozen or so truckers from all over the country filling the air with hymns.

A church at a truck stop? Actually, it's more common than you might think. But only because I

ran into trouble back when I was a trucker myself.

I'd been driving a big rig for three years, and I could make runs from my hometown of Dublin, Georgia, to just about anywhere without a map. But inside, I felt lost. Those long days and nights on the road were lonely. Sometimes I could barely keep my eyes open. One night a fellow trucker offered me some pills to stay awake. I didn't say no. The pills put me on edge. I worked even longer hours, grew distant from my wife, Jan, and our young son.

One night I blacked out at the wheel. The truck ran off the road, tipped onto its side and skidded into a ditch. The load spilled out of the trailer. Amazingly, I wasn't hurt. But I was suspended for two weeks.

It was a wakeup call. As soon as I returned home from my first run after the accident, I went to a local Baptist church for the first time in years. I thought someone told the pastor I was coming because every word of his sermon hit home. I had been neglecting my family, my friends, even my

Positive People

own health. Finally, the pastor came down from the pulpit. "I'm meeting you halfway," he said. "Will you travel the rest?" I stood up and met him at the altar.

From then on, I would find a church on the road and go to a Bible study at home. Praying with others gave me a bigger boost than any pills ever could. The hardest thing was finding a church in

Praying with others gave me a bigger boost than any pills ever could.

a strange city. And there was rarely room to park my big rig.

After I quit running over the road and started running more locally, I got the idea to start a Bible study at a big truck stop in Atlanta. My wife loved the idea. I called the manager of the T/A stop in Atlanta, expecting him to laugh, but he offered up some space.

That first meeting, about a dozen people

showed up. One guy didn't say a single word until the very end, when he came up to me. "I was running low, Chaplain Joe," he said. "You filled up my tank."

"How 'bout Texas?" "Got anything out in California?" The requests for chapels at more truck stops kept coming in. I called truck stops and found local ministers to lead the services, and I bought Bibles by the case and gave them out to drivers. Two trucking companies even offered to pay my salary—to quit trucking and serve as the president of Trucktop Ministries. In many of the locations, we set up converted tractor trailers so that drivers will have a place to worship together whenever they stop by.

Today, Truckstop Ministries has 500 workers in 77 locations nationwide. Our rigs aren't the only things that need refueling. Our spirits do too. ☺

➡ Get more stories about Positive People at guideposts.com/positivepeople

The Blessings of **FRIENDSHIP**

Scientists say there is a simple secret to living a longer, happier and healthier life

By Mary Ann O’Roark ROVING EDITOR

Usually I talk about everything with my friends—that’s what friends are for, right? But not my hip-replacement surgery. I guess I thought downplaying the whole thing would make it less scary. I kept telling myself I’d be fine. I could handle it on my own. Then my friend Mona and I were having one of our rambling conversations and I couldn’t help myself. I blurted out the swiftly approaching date of my surgery. “How are you getting to the hospital?” she asked.

“I’ll take the bus. It’s not far.”

“You are *not* going alone,” Mona said. “I’m coming with you and I’m going to call Jeanne to see if she can come too.” Jeanne, another dear friend.

The two of them picked me up at my apartment in a cab. They rode with me to the hospital and stayed. When I woke up in recovery, Mona and Jeanne were there. They helped me get settled in my room and gave me gifts that made me laugh—hot-pink feathers for my hair and cards with whimsical promises (“This coupon entitles you to endless hours of your friends telling you how fabulous you are.”) They distracted me from my pain and chased away my fears. My friends got me through something I thought I could endure on my own but now can’t imagine it. And it wasn’t the first time. Over the years, from my best friend in first grade, Karen Sue, to people I meet today, I’ve been blessed with many good friends. They’ve played a particularly important role in my life. Maybe because I’m single and don’t have kids. But really, for any of us, friendship is a godsend. Just think of all the ways our friends are with us.

Art of Living

In hard times

One of my favorite Bible verses is when Jesus tells us, "I will not leave you comfortless." I've found that comfort often comes through my friends.

I love cats. I've always had a pair of them, watching the birds outside my living room window, purring me to sleep at night. My most recent twosome was Clarence and Sheila. Clarence was an especially adept hunter. I'd see him swatting at flies or stalking bugs with the seriousness of a lion on the trail of its prey. I was devastated when he got cancer. Friends showered me with e-mails, candles, cat figurines. I put together a memorial, printing out their prayers. It helped make my loss easier to bear.

I didn't have a long farewell with Sheila. I couldn't bring myself to call anyone so I posted a message on Facebook. "The vet's coming in an hour to euthanize my beloved kitty," I wrote. "My heart is breaking." Within minutes I started hearing from family, friends, people as far away as England and Iraq. They did not leave me comfortless.

In good times

I don't remember telling Frances it was my birthday. I can't figure out how she knew (unless it was through Facebook). She invited me over for dinner with no mention of my birthday. I went to her home, surprised to see a little stack of packages wrapped in tissue paper. *I wonder who else has a birthday?* I thought. "Those are for you, Mary Ann" she said. I opened the gifts. A pin from our neighborhood flea market, a potholder, a book of poems—nothing extravagant but all things she knew I'd adore. I was so touched. Dinner was delicious. For dessert? A cupcake with one candle and a rousing rendition of "Happy Birthday."

Like the saying goes, a joy shared is a joy doubled.

In ways you never expect

We've all had those moments. A friend asks you to do a favor, and the timing is terrible. A ride to the airport, say, when you've got a meeting all the way across town, or a last-minute plea

Art of Living

for babysitting just when you've settled in for the night with a movie and takeout.

I like having houseguests, but when my childhood friend Stephanie called to say she had some doctors' appointments in New York and hoped she could crash on my couch, I almost said no. I was up against deadlines at work and was worried about a health issue of my own. But how could I turn Stephanie down? "Sure," I said, praying I wouldn't be crabby while she was here.

You know what? Stephanie turned out to be the right guest at the right time. Talking to her every night was a wonderful way to unwind from the stress of my workday. And being able to help my friend gave me just the lift I needed.

With just a little effort

Friendships need nurturing, and sometimes I get overwhelmed. I'll forget a birthday. Or I'll think I need to send a magnificent get-well bouquet. Then I'll remember how much a simple "You're in my thoughts" call or e-mail means to me.

Sam moved across the country almost 20 years ago. We talk on the phone a few times a year; each time I feel as close to her as ever. That's the magic of a friendship that goes soul-deep.

It's worth doing little things to keep friendships flourishing. Pick a date that reminds you of your friend, then make sure you get together even if it's just for lunch. I have two friends I see only once a year, but that spring weekend we spend together is sacrosanct. We pick a place to talk, read poetry, cook. That time is for us, enriching us at the deepest level.

In prayer

Knowing my friends are praying for me helps more than anything. Once, I mentioned to my former housemate Sharon I'd been waking up in the middle of the night, tossing and turning. The next day Sharon called and asked how I'd slept. I was pleased to report I'd woken up but was able to go right back to sleep. "Was that about three A.M.?" she asked.

How did she know? "I was awake too," she said, "praying for you. I think of it as my middle-of-the-night club. If I wake up and can't get back to sleep, I pray for friends. Last night I thought of you."

Then there are the times when friends pray *with* me. On the morning of September 11, 2001, I was in my office in midtown Manhattan. I heard sirens screaming and saw smoke billowing from the towers. I was stunned. Terrified. There were dozens of friends I wanted to talk to, but the phones were jammed. Suddenly, the phone on my desk rang. It was my friend Kathleen, who's in Texas. "Put your fingers on your wrist," she said. "Feel your pulse and repeat with me, 'Be still and know that I am God.'" What I couldn't do on my own, I could in prayer with a friend.

My friends bring me peace when I'm afraid, joy when I'm happy, up when I'm down. Scientists tell us friendships are crucial to well-being and longevity. What can't be measured, however, is the quantity of God's grace they provide. @

For more on this story, see Family Room.

MYSTERIOUS WAYS

Grandma, Grandma, tell us a story!" Four darling children sat by my feet, looking up at me expectantly.

Suddenly, we were interrupted by clapping. "Terrific," the director said, stepping up to the stage from the chapel aisle. "Except, could you kids face the audience a bit more?" The kids shifted to face the empty pews, which would be filled in a few days for the church play. "Perfect," the director said. "Now, Grandma, read to your grandchildren." A pang of sadness hit me. If only I could read to my real grandchild!

I had a granddaughter, but I'd never met her. Sixteen years earlier my son was involved in a relationship that ended badly. But out of it came a blessing: a baby girl named Lena. I yearned to be a grandmother to her—but shortly after the birth, the mother moved and left no forwarding address. My son had no idea where his daughter was. Over the years, I asked around town to try and find my son's ex, but it seemed

Mysterious Ways



I had a granddaughter named Lena, but I had never met her. I yearned to be a grandmother to her.

she didn't want to be found.

I'd just joined this new church a week earlier, and was promptly offered the part of Grandma in the play. At least now I could pretend to be a grandma. The rehearsals went well, and finally the day of the show arrived. The performance was great. "You all looked so natural up there," one of my friends said.

Afterward, we went to the church basement for refreshments. I walked over to one of the girls in the play. Re-

hearsals had been such a whirlwind we never really got to talk. "How's my granddaughter?" I joked.

"Fine!" she answered. Just then, someone else walked up and asked the girl her name.

I wasn't sure I heard the girl's answer correctly.

But it made me ask her another question. "What's your mother's name?"

She told me.

I was still in shock. "And what's your father's name?" I asked.

It was my son.

"Lena," I said, "you're not going to believe this... but, I really am your grandmother!"

She'd only started going to that church a week before I did. Since that day of the play, we've stayed close. Not long ago, she even made me a great-grandma.

**—Christine West
HARDY, KENTUCKY**

Have your own *Mysterious Ways* story?
Send it to mw@guideposts.com.

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Cover Story

Everyone knows the Jonas Brothers and their music. Now...

Meet the **MOM**

By Denise Jonas, DALLAS, TEXAS

Believe it or not, no one is famous in the Jonas household. Yes, I'm blessed to have four very talented sons you might have heard of. But the challenges I had raising them are like what all moms face. I had to discipline and encourage them, set boundaries and bring them up with good values. I had to tolerate their tussling and correct them when they made mistakes. I also learned from my mistakes. When you raise kids, you grow a lot too. Most of all, I had to make sure they knew they were loved. Love is the greatest value of all.

Recently I became a spokesperson (you could



Cover Story

call me a spokesmom) for a website called iMom. It's a quick, easy place for busy moms to go for solid parenting advice, some of which I used raising my kids and some I could've used!

Let 'em have fun. With four boys I quickly found out rugs are like tumbling mats and a sofa will be turned into a fort. I remember being in the kitchen once and wondering if a football team had invaded the living room. "Rug time," I called it. I thought of it as rearranging the furniture without a license. But you know what? My husband, Kevin, made sure no one got hurt and the boys released a lot of pent-up energy.

So forget the Hummel figurines for now. Let your kids have fun. And have fun with them.

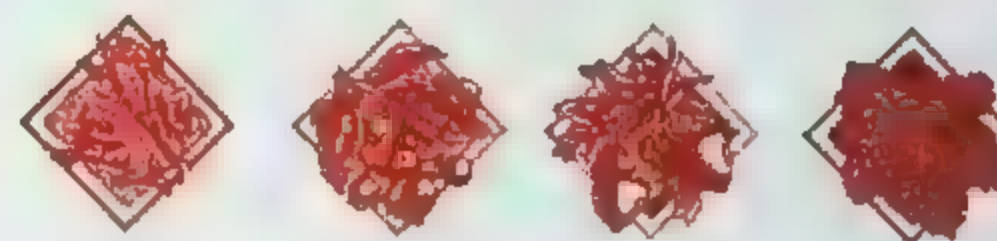
Never mind the hair. Hair is a battlefield. My boys have my hair—as every interviewer likes to point out. Thick and curly, thanks to my Italian heritage. For some reason every teenage boy likes to try something crazy with their hair. They let it grow so long you can't see their eyes or they iron it straight. Or

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they put so much goop on it it's as alluring as a porcupine. Every mom has a moment where she wants to attack her son's hair with a comb or clippers. Resist. You have to choose your battles. Hair isn't all that important. What matters is what's underneath.

Buy the drum set. The most valuable thing a parent can do is nurture your kids' gifts. Your daughter wants to play softball? Find a team. Your son likes to sing? Listen.

The boys grew up surrounded by music. Kevin, Sr. (our oldest is also Kevin), is an amazing vocalist and songwriter. He was the pastor and worship leader at our church, so the boys learned all his songs (you should hear them mimic him—they love to tease). Nick was the most precocious musically. At age three, he wandered around the house, asking, "Do you hear that? Do you hear the music?" Then he'd burst out with some song.

One day when he was eight a lady heard him at the salon where I was getting my hair done. "That kid should be on Broadway," she said. She

Cover Story

introduced us to a manager and soon Nick was performing six nights a week in shows like *Les Misérables* and *Beauty and the Beast*. It wasn't easy sending him off to be with people I didn't know—his dad usually drove him into New York from our house in New Jersey. I worried. But I knew I had to help Nick believe in himself. He learned more about music and performing than we could ever teach him and he met kids who shared his passion. Me? I learned to trust in the gifts God had given Nick and help him realize his talent.

Stay connected. Not every phone call or text message you send to your teenagers is going to be returned. Don't stop sending messages. Kids need to know you love them. I even buy cards for the boys when they're on the road.

And it's so touching when they connect to you. Two weeks ago I came home to a bouquet of flowers and a card from Joe. All he wanted to say was: "I love you, Mom." It made my day. In our house you can never say "I love you" too much.

Be the mom. You're not the best friend. You're the mom. Set limits and an example. Anyone can be a friend. Only the mom can be the mom.

Sometimes that's difficult. My kids are responsible and hard-working. I'll worry I'm being too strict or I'm not trusting them enough. For instance, not long ago the boys were performing one night and Frankie, our youngest, begged to join them. He'd been sick all week. I thought, *He's not well yet. He shouldn't go.* Then I backed down. Frankie wanted so badly to join his brothers, I hated to disappoint him. He went to the rehearsal... and crashed. At the hotel I tucked him into bed. "Mom," he said, "you were right. I needed to stay home. I'm sorry I didn't listen." It was sweet to hear those words. Balm to any mom's ears. But I should've held my ground. He needed me to set limits. To be the mom.

Step back. One of my favorites of the boys' songs is called "Pushing Me Away." Every time they do it in concert, I get choked up because it speaks to one

Cover Story

of my weaknesses as a mom. I'm passionate and strong-willed—my Italian blood again. I want to be front and center in my kids' lives. I have opinions about everything. I have a lot of influence with them. All the more reason I sometimes need to step back and let God do the most important work. Don't push him out of the way! Which brings me to my last point.

Pray. My mom was a prayer warrior when I was growing up and taught me to trust God. Still, letting go can be scary.

Several years ago Nick started losing weight. On a school retreat, Joe saw that his brother wasn't doing well. "When we went swimming," he said, "he looked like a skeleton." We took Nick to the hospital, and he was diagnosed with diabetes. For several nights, while doctors worked at getting his insulin levels in check, I sat by his hospital bed, praying. "Lord," I asked, "what's your purpose here? What's going to happen to Nick? Will he ever perform again?" I could remember seeing the

joy on his face those first times he performed on Broadway. Why would God deny him something that was so clearly his gift?

In the dim morning light, I reminded myself there was only one thing to do. Trust. Let go. It's the hardest thing for any mom, but we can't allow God to do his work unless we give up our control.

Today, Nick performs with a small insulin pump attached to his back. He's got a wireless device that he keeps in his pocket to monitor levels. There are worries of course. Will the pump work? Do we have a back-up pump? Do we have shots with us when he's on tour?

When the fears get the worst of me, I pray—fiercely and fervently. I love my kids, but God loves them just as much if not more. I remember how my mom prayed for me, and I pray for them. That they're safe in God's hands. That they'll be well. That they'll make good choices. That they'll know, no matter what, they have a mom who believes in them and knows when to let go and let God. ©

For more on this story, see Family Room.

Divine **DREAMS**

In a popular GUIDEPOSTS article, Ptolemy Tomkins asked, do our pets go to heaven? Now he's written a book about it

By Ptolemy Tompkins
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

A few years back I wrote an article for GUIDEPOSTS on a subject I knew readers were interested in: Do our beloved pets join us in heaven? It's a comforting notion, but I wanted to see if there was theological justification for it. Your response was an overwhelming yes. The topic, I realized, deserved more than could fit into a single article. It deserved a whole book. Do ani-

mals have souls? Where do those souls go when they leave this earth? Will our pets be there to greet us when our own time comes? And what happens to that unique, God-given personality we miss so much when a beloved pet dies? Most of my article focused on what the Bible says on these subjects. But the Bible was only the beginning.

I eventually left Guideposts to work on the book full-time. Instead of spending my days in an office filled with people, I found myself alone with my computer.

Or rather, almost alone. I did have one steady companion, my schipperke Mercury. Schipperkes are smart, hyper-alert dogs. Once, I'd watched in astonishment as Mercury leapt up and caught a sparrow in mid-flight (don't worry, I took the startled bird and released it unharmed). But those days were long gone. Mercury's glossy black coat was dull now and fringed with white, and his sight was so bad that when we visited friends with cats, he tottered right past them. Often, in the midst of writing, I'd look down at Mercury lying at my feet

Animals and Healing

and wonder how I'd cope when his time came.

Most of the letters I received in response to my GUIDEPOSTS piece came from people who wanted to tell me how deeply they had grieved the loss of a pet. A surprising number had received assurance that came in a dream, a heavenly confirmation that their animal companions lived on. "I was crushed," ran a typical letter, "when my 15-year-old white Persian Mindy died in my arms. I'm a widow and my kids are grown. Mindy was all I had. I didn't know if I could continue without her. One night a week or so after Mindy left me, I had an unbelievably vivid dream. Mindy was curled in my arms just as she always used to be. She was young and healthy again, her coat bright and shiny, her big yellow eyes clear and sharp. She looked up at me, and in those diamond eyes of hers I saw something I'll never forget. *I'm still here, she was telling me. Even though you can't see me or touch me anymore, my spirit is with you... and always will be.*

"The dream was so vivid that it jolted me awake.

I sensed something in the bedroom with me. Right away I knew what it was. Mindy's spirit. I lay there quietly, thanking God for what he'd shown me. Finally, I went back to sleep. The next morning the feeling in the room was gone, but my view of the world had changed—for good."

I did a little research into this phenomenon and discovered that these dreams usually come to us

In that special place between sleeping and waking, the doors of our mind are open.

in what is technically known as the hypnagogic state. Hypnagogia occurs when we are in that strange place between waking and sleep, where we are neither fully conscious nor unconscious. The word "hypnagogia" comes from combining the Greek words for "sleep" (*hypnos*) and for "conductor" (*agogeus*). The third-century A.D. Greek philosopher Iamblichus called the visions that occur in this state "god-sent," and even

Animals and Healing

Aristotle—a philosopher not known for his flights of otherworldly fancy—wrote that “in the moment of awakening” a man may “surprise the images which present themselves to him in sleep.”

Can we—or, perhaps more important, *should* we—trust the messages we receive in the hypnagogic state? From Jacob’s vision of the ladder of angels in Genesis to the prophecy in Acts that “your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams,” the Bible is rich with suggestions that dreams can be a genuine conduit for God’s word. As the biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann notes, “The ancients dared to imagine that this unbidden communication is one venue in which the holy purposes of God, perplexing and unreasonable as they might be, come to us.”

Most of us experience the hypnagogic state twice a day—in the morning when we exit the world of sleep and in the evening when we enter it again. At those moments, the doors of our mind are open, and evidence of a larger world can creep into our consciousness before the everyday

waking world comes along and crowds it out.

That’s not to say every dream we have is a message from beyond. But some dreams unmistakably are. Some dreams are simply *different* from others, and when we have them we know it. These dreams, the philosopher and religious scholar Titus Burckhardt writes, “mostly occur at dawn and continue until waking” and “are accompanied by an irrefutable feeling of objectivity. These are the dreams that come from the angel.”

In the classic hypnagogic pet dream, a bereaved pet owner sees her ill and aged animal young and vigorous again, in a beautiful setting—often, a green field alive with flowers. People typically awake from these dreams suffused with a feeling of well-being. They know with certainty that their pets are okay, and that they will see them again one day.

I finished work on my book *The Divine Life of Animals* last fall. Then, just before Christmas, the moment I’d long known was coming arrived. Mercury and I were at my sister’s house for the

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holidays. Two days into our visit he took a sudden turn for the worse. A vet told us that Mercury was very close to death, and administered a shot to end his pain.

I laid Mercury to rest in my sister's backyard with his head facing east—the direction of sunrise and, I knew from my book research, the direction humans have buried their dead since prehistoric times. Going to sleep that night, I wondered if, after all the reading I'd done about the dreams that grieving pet owners experience, I might have one of my own.

I didn't. But later that morning, I walked out to Mercury's resting place and something occurred to me. Often during those last two years of Mercury's life, when I was working on my book, I'd hear whimpering. I'd look down at Mercury, asleep in his bed, and see his paws moving. Tentatively, then excitedly, he would kick his legs and utter little barks.

Some of those dreams didn't seem all that pleasant; maybe they were the canine equivalent

of nightmares. In other dreams, though, Mercury seemed quite happy. So happy, in fact, that I would take care not to wake him and rob him of the joy of being able to run and gambol the way he'd loved to when he was younger. *What are you seeing?* I asked him silently as I watched his paws, gray with age, kick and buck as if he were a pup chasing birds. But even as I asked, I knew the answer. Mercury was getting a foretaste of a place where he truly would run and play again. A place we can never see with complete clarity here on earth, but which certain dreams—the dreams that come “from the angel”—give us a wondrous and reassuring glimpse. ©

For more on this story, see Family Room.

➡ Get more Animals and Healing
at guideposts.com/pets

A Chance to **GROW**

**Five years into retirement
my muscular dystrophy was
getting worse and I was
getting restless**

By David Gary, TYLER, TEXAS

Retirement wasn't what I'd expected. When my brother and I sold our photography business, I pictured a life of ease. Dad started the business when I was a kid and except for a few breaks—college, flying on Air Force B-52s in Vietnam—I'd been helping take photos and working in a darkroom my whole life. My brother and I took over after Dad died. The business was pretty much all I knew. Which I guess was my problem.



GREEN THUMB David devised ways
to garden from his power chair.

After retiring, I lived that life of ease. Too much ease. While my wife, Linda, was at work—teaching high school English—I sat around watching TV all day. Why didn't I get up, go outside, do something? I'd sure spent enough time dreaming of getting out of the darkroom and basking

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in the Texas sun. Not that I did—emerging from the darkroom would've meant greeting customers. That was my brother's job. I was too shy. Part of it, I suppose, was my muscular dystrophy. I'd been diagnosed in my twenties after returning from Vietnam. Even that wasn't much of an excuse. I had a slow-developing form of the disease. At 52, when we sold the business, I walked fine with a cane. The truth was, something took hold of me in retirement. A lack of purpose. A sense that the end of work somehow meant the end of life, or at least a substantial part of it. I was too stuck to imagine anything else.

One sunny April afternoon Linda managed to pry me from the couch for a walk at the Dallas Arboretum. I'd been to the arboretum many times. It was only a few miles from our house, and Dad, my brother and I had photographed countless weddings there. I knew what Linda was up to—yet another attempt to rouse me from my funk. Well, I didn't feel like being roused. We sat on a bench. An electric tram whirred by ferrying

visitors on a tour. The driver's voice floated out: "Now those flowers over there...."

"I bet those trams are driven by volunteers," Linda said. "You could do that."

Here we go, I thought. "No, I couldn't," I said. "I don't know a thing about flowers." She had the green thumb, not me. I didn't add that the prospect of speaking to a tram full of strangers petrified me. Linda said nothing, and soon we left.

We got deeper into spring. I tried to enjoy the nice weather by going out to check the mail or by sitting on the porch. But I felt restless. In spite of myself, I kept thinking about that arboretum. It's one of the largest and most respected in the country. Pathways wind through ornamental gardens bursting with color and past collections of rare plants from around the globe. Why couldn't I volunteer? Spending sunny days there sure would beat another trip to the mailbox.

But of course I couldn't. Linda was the gardener in our house. I was too shy. I couldn't walk well. Besides, they probably had tons of volunteers.

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They'd never need a slow old guy like me. The excuses piled up, yet one day, to my own surprise, I got in the car and made the short drive to the arboretum. Clutching my cane, I approached a parked tram. "I'd like to drive one of these," I blurted to a driver waiting for passengers. "How would I get started doing that?"

The man pointed me to an administration building tucked amid budding trees. I walked into the office. Before I could tell Cris Emrich, the volunteer coordinator, how little I knew about plants and all the other reasons I would make a terrible volunteer, she had signed me up for a training ride two days later. "Thanks for coming in!" she said, handing me a manual outlining the arboretum's collections. "We need people." She never even looked at my cane.

Two days later I boarded a tram with Jack Mason, a longtime volunteer who trained new drivers. Jack was retired just like I was. "Pretty much all the drivers are," he said. "We're the ones with all the time to give, right?" I nodded.

Jack's tram filled with visitors, and soon we

were winding through gardens and past greenhouses. I scribbled notes, trying to keep up with his confident explanations. Jack was funny and relaxed. The riders smiled, taking in the beautiful sights and scents. Could I be as fun? I wondered. I doubted it. I'd spent most of my life in a darkroom.

That night I pored over the manual. I waited for Linda to say, "Told you so," but she didn't. She was probably just glad to see me looking at something besides TV. She went to bed early and I read on late into the night, trying to absorb the arboretum's dizzying array of gardens, plants and research projects. The place was really amazing.

A few days later I stood beside a tram waiting for my first batch of visitors. It was raining. A woman with an umbrella came up. "This is the tour tram?" she asked. I nodded. She climbed aboard and we waited. No one else showed up. I got behind the wheel and pulled onto the path. The woman told me she was from New York City. I ran through my routine—history of the arboretum, historic buildings housing garden programs

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and offices, ornate fountains, the names of as many blooming flowers as I could remember (not many). I tossed in a joke. The woman laughed! The tour ended. "This is my last day in Dallas," the woman said. "I wasn't going to miss out on this place even though it's raining. Your tour was wonderful! Thank you so much."

Driving that tram became the highlight of my week. I perfected my routine, memorizing reams of information about the arboretum, getting the timing of my jokes down. My face and arms tanned in the summer sun. Any time a passenger asked a question I couldn't answer, I ran home at the end of the day and looked it up online. Or I asked an arboretum landscape designer. Those people knew *everything*. The more I learned about the gardens, the more I wanted to know. Soil treatments, the best seasons for different plants, sun and shade tolerance—it fascinated me how all these realms of knowledge came together to produce something so beautiful. I began to wonder, Could I do that?

Up to that point my entire gardening experience



GUIDED David, piloting a tram tour of the Dallas Arboretum

had consisted of mowing and edging the lawn. Linda was the one filling our house with potted plants and flowers. I went to an arboretum garden-er for advice. She asked me about our yard, then took me to some flower beds. "These would probably work very nicely for you," she said, pointing to some impatiens and begonias. I went straight to a nursery and bought several flats of flowers and bags of mulch and a few gardening books.

The next day I lowered myself slowly to the grass in front of the house and dug in with a trowel. I'd already turned the soil over and spread the mulch. Beside me was a flat of impatiens flopping in their black pots. The sun was hot. I was sweating. My hands were dirty. It was the farthest thing from a darkroom I could have imagined.

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That's when it hit me. I'd only been volunteering at the arboretum for a few months, and all of a sudden my life was changed. When was the last time I'd watched daytime TV? I couldn't remember. There was no room in my brain for anything but plants. I ate, slept, went to the arboretum and thought about gardening, about coaxing beauty from the ground a little like the way an image becomes slowly clear when you develop a photograph. The tan on my arms and face had deepened to a dark brown. At some point in the past few months—I couldn't pinpoint when exactly—something had taken hold of me. Whatever life force bloomed in that Dallas Arboretum, making all those flowers so bright and beautiful, now it bloomed inside me too.

I put down my trowel. Of course, I knew what that life force was. He'd been there all along, no doubt from that first moment when Linda spied the arboretum tram and suggested I give it a try. "Thank you, God," I whispered, "for showing me life doesn't end at retirement. It only ends when we take our eyes off you."

It's been seven years since that day I drove that nice lady from New York around my beloved arboretum. I still drive a tram—even though Linda and I now live 100 miles from Dallas. Linda completed a doctorate in English and got a teaching job at a college here in Tyler. I commute to the arboretum three times a month. I guess we're both living proof that the giver of life is never done giving new life.

I designed a garden here in Tyler, complete with decomposed granite pathways perfect for the wheelchair I now use. I became a certified master gardener—you take a test and log hours helping other household gardeners—and I give talks to churches and community groups about gardening from a wheelchair. That's right, me, the guy who used to be too shy to emerge from the darkroom. I'm like a plant in new soil, growing and thriving under the loving care of the Master Gardener himself. ☺

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MOTHER AND SON "You feel powerless watching someone you love self-destruct," says Marion.

Miraculous Healings

It was becoming clear to me: Our son's addiction was stronger than us. His counselor asked, Could we give him one more chance?

A Room for **JEREMY**

By Marion Bond West
WATKINSVILLE, GEORGIA

My son Jeremy stood aside, not meeting my eyes—or maybe it was me who didn't want to meet his—and let my husband Gene and me walk into his mental health counselor's office ahead of him. We'd gotten him out of jail two nights before. Blenda, an addictions specialist, had given him an emergency appoint-

Miraculous Healings

ment that May morning and urged us to sit in on the session.

Every time Jeremy got into trouble and couldn't find a way out—and there had been so many times that I'd finally lost count—he hurried back to Blenda, as if he knew she was the one person in the world tough enough to keep trying with him.

She had counseled Jeremy for six years and she'd seen him in every kind of emotional state imaginable. Uncontrollable rages fueled by drugs. Manic know-it-all phases when he stopped taking his medication for bipolar disorder. Withdrawn and scared moods. Or those increasingly rare instances when he was charming and funny, polite and cooperative. When he was the son I still had hope for, however fading.

I sat down on the brown leather sofa in Blenda's office, wondering which Jeremy we would see this time. Gene took a chair. Jeremy plopped down on the sofa next to me. Evidently he remembered that Blenda figured out a lot about family dynamics based on where everyone chose to sit.

Jeremy had showered, shaved and put on clean clothes. He must have left them behind the last time he stayed at our house—when I'd caught him huffing (inhaling aerosol sprays to get high), and had to kick him out. Now he leaned forward, clasping his hands loosely between his long legs, and listened intently to Blenda. His eager, cooperative posture.

I inched away from him on the sofa. *Just give it up, Marion, a weary voice inside told me. You can't let yourself hope anymore. It's too late for Jeremy.*

Jeremy had lost his father, my first husband, when he was 15 years old—a vulnerable age, not that he showed it. He had seemed so strong then, forging through his grief, taking over his father's jobs around the house, like keeping our yard perfectly weeded and mown. In his twenties, he ran his own thriving landscaping business. But in his mid-thirties, Jeremy fell apart, as if all the feelings he'd been holding back since he was a teenager erupted, a kind of emotional volcano that

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destroyed everything in its path—cars, apartments, relationships, his business, the successful life he had built for himself.

Now he was 41, and I was terrified that addiction and bipolar disorder had finally swallowed up the real Jeremy. I'd read the arrest report. The police had been questioning people in the neighborhood where Jeremy was hanging out. He hadn't committed the crime they were investigating, and if he had just cooperated, he wouldn't have ended up in jail. But he had been skipping his bipolar meds. He reacted belligerently. He said that he'd done meth, cursed the officers, charged at them. They had to tase him twice.

I hardly heard a word Jeremy said to his counselor. My mind kept going back to two nights before, when we'd picked him up from jail. Guards led him into the waiting area, limping—an old hip injury from one of his car wrecks. "It's not my fault," he bellowed. "I was just standing there minding my own business!" The bedraggled clothing, the dirt-encrusted hands, the wild

eyes...nothing about this disturbed man resembled the Jeremy I knew, the son I loved.

"Marion, Gene," the counselor's no-nonsense voice brought me back to the session. "I'm very concerned for Jeremy's life right now. He doesn't have many more chances. I'm asking you to take him into your home for at least thirty days. He needs structure. But if he breaks even one rule; he's out. He must get back on his bipolar medication, see counselors regularly, go to 12-step meetings..."

I wanted to scream, *Blenda, we've lost the battle. Can't you see that?* Didn't she understand the terrible anguish of watching someone you love self-destruct and feeling powerless to help him? She really expected me to open myself up again to that kind of pain? I glared at her as she rocked gently in her chair, waiting for our answer.

Jeremy sat up straight, rubbing his hands back and forth on his jeans, not daring to look at me or Gene.

"He can stay with us," Gene said.

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I didn't know how he could be so calm. I didn't trust myself to speak. I just nodded mutely. It was more resignation than consent.

When we got home, I put Jeremy in the guest room. He joined us for meals. But I kept my heart closed off. Constantly I watched him for any slip-up, any deception, even the smallest white lie. One mistake and I was ready to pounce. I was not going to get hurt again. I was not going to risk having hope again for my son. Hope had been such an empty promise.

To my amazement, the county health department promptly provided excellent counseling and the prescription medication Jeremy needed to control his bipolar disorder—all free of charge. Begrudgingly, I gave a silent prayer of thanks.

Jeremy found an AA group that met at seven in the morning. "I need this to start my day off right," he told us. Since his driver's license had been revoked, he got someone else in the group to pick him up and then bring him back to our house afterward. He went to those meetings six days a week.

The seventh day he went to meetings of the biblically based program Celebrate Recovery.

"Man, you can confess anything there," he told us one night at supper. "No one judges or rejects you. I fit in." He paused. "I'm going to make it this time." There was a quietness in his tone, not his old bravado.

"Sounds good," Gene said. The smile he gave Jeremy said even more. It said, *I believe you will make it.*

Lord, how I wish I could believe it too, I thought.

Jeremy was trying hard. He kept his room immaculate. He helped around the house without being prompted and kept asking us if there was more that he could do, even as his limp grew worse. He took his meds regularly. He went to his counseling appointments. He was committed to his recovery groups.

Still, I kept thinking—almost expecting—that he would revert to his old behavior. I had seen it happen so many times already—Jeremy would get clean only to relapse and sink even lower than

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he had been before. And each time it felt as if he were taking a part of me with him.

Six months after Jeremy moved in with us, Blenda agreed that he was ready to try living on his own again. In November, he rented a starter apartment in the nearby town of Athens. He told us about an organization there that provided medical care for people who couldn't afford it. He had talked to someone in their office who thought that they might be able to give him hip-replacement surgery, free of charge. I was certain that he had misunderstood. It just sounded too good to be true. But sure enough, just before Christmastime, Jeremy received a new hip, compliments of Mercy Health Center.

Soon, Jeremy was getting around so well that he was back doing some lawn care. His clients were so pleased with his work that they were willing to come over and pick him up. He even lined up a job at a bakery-café and bought an old bike for five dollars at a yard sale so that he could get to and from work.

Part of me was happy for Jeremy. But another part of me couldn't help remembering his last apartment—a nice place that had ended up trashed after repeated drug binges. It seemed as if the more progress my son made, the more I imagined the worst.

One spring day I was driving home from shopping and passed Jeremy's new apartment. His ancient yard-sale bike was chained to a post. That meant he was home. I decided to stop in and say hi. Or was I checking on him, always concerned that I might catch him at something? Did I just want to get the disappointment over with?

The door was unlocked. I walked in. "Hey, it's me," I called. The small three-room apartment was sparkling clean and fresh smelling, neater than I'd ever kept my house.

Jeremy hollered from the bedroom, "Take off your shoes, Mom. I just vacuumed and mopped." He came out to the kitchen, carrying his Bible. "Guess what? They made me a spon-

Miraculous Healings

sor at Celebrate Recovery last night. And later this month, I get my one-year chip from AA." He was beaming. "Check out Romans 5:5," he said. He handed me his Bible. He had highlighted the Scripture in yellow: *Hope does not disappoint.*

I looked up at Jeremy. There was a sweetness in his expression, a trust that I had all but forgotten since I had let go of hope.

Right then the sun streamed in through the little kitchen window, and we stood there together, bathed in light. I took a deep breath and caught the faint aroma of bleach and something else, something fresh and citrusy: lemon.

Hope will always smell like lemons to me. At that moment, standing there looking into my son's clear eyes, I let myself trust in the miracle of his recovery, and whatever plan God had for Jeremy. I let hope into my life again, a hope as warm and bright as sunlight. ☺

➔ Don't miss Marion's blog at guideposts.com/womantowoman

Close Calls

Mother COURAGE

As the tornado bore down, I screamed, "Everyone get into the closet!" But would it be enough to protect the children?

By Kimmie Newton
MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE

I put my feet up on the living room couch and switched on the TV. It felt nice to relax—if only for a moment. Good Friday. A day off from my college classes. The kids—James, 14, and Leslee, 10—didn't have school either. It seemed like forever since I didn't have something pressing to worry about, the kids' school events, helping them with their homework, writing my

Close Calls

own term paper, housework, errands. I'm a single mom and sometimes it was all I could do to hold everything together.

In the back of the house I heard boys laughing and shouting. I smiled at the racket. The house hadn't felt this alive since we'd moved to Murfreesboro a little over a year ago. I'd been thrilled when James had asked if five boys could spend the night. I was already planning to watch my seven-year-old niece, Adrian. Leslee was spending the weekend at a friend's house. It was great to see the kids adjusting so well. That was one thing I hadn't had to worry about.

The TV went dark. Then it flashed to a team of news anchors. "We interrupt our regularly scheduled programming so we can bring you coverage of tornado activity in the Nashville area," one said. *Tornado?* Outside, rain was falling, but it wasn't a storm. *Must be someplace on the other side of the city.* Still, was there something I should do? I listened for more information but didn't get any.

That was the hardest part these days, feeling like so much depended on me. I longed to meet more people, to feel like I was part of a community. I'd gone to church, wanting to put my trust



AFTERMATH Kimmie's split-second decision to have the kids (AJ, James, Pitts, Kyle, Adrian and Tyler) take shelter in the bathroom closet was lifesaving.

Close Calls

in God, to have that comfort that no matter what things would be okay. But in the end, *everything* still seemed to fall on me.

"This just in," the TV anchor again broke in. "The National Weather Service is reporting that a tornado has been spotted over Interstate 24 near Murfreesboro." Interstate 24? That was only 20 minutes away! I looked outside. It was hailing. "Cool!" shouted one of the boys. "Let's go outside."

"No, you're not," I said. "There's a tornado." I needed a plan. Fast. Some way to protect a household of kids. We needed to get away from windows. But where could we go? We didn't have a basement. An interior room, then. Someplace safe from falling objects. The bathroom was the most central room in the house. And it had a closet. But for eight people? There was no other choice. "Listen," I said to the boys and Adrian. "If it gets worse, get in the bathroom."

The boys ran excitedly between the front and back doors, opening them to watch the hail. Then

I heard one call to me, "Miss Kim, I think you better come look at this." I ran to the back door. A massive black cloud with flashes of blue light filled the sky. *Omigosh!* I thought. *It's coming right at us!*

"Run!" I screamed. We scrambled to the bathroom closet. Then stopped. "Is this where you meant?" one of the boys asked. I knew what he was thinking. It was maybe five feet long and two feet deep. Too small. But already we could feel the air pressure pushing against us. There wasn't time to go anywhere else. James went in first. Then the other boys piled in, lying on top of each other. I lifted Adrian and handed her to James.

"We'll be okay," I said, trying to hold back my rising fear. "James, whatever happens, don't let go of Adrian." I squeezed in last, my body bent like a pretzel, crouching over the kids' bodies. Somehow we managed to shut the doors. It seemed like there wasn't enough oxygen. We could hear rumbling outside getting louder, the air pressure literally squeezing us, as if the walls of the closet

Close Calls

would crumble at any minute. Someone—more than one person—was crying. I could feel myself panicking. This closet was so rickety. I needed to do something. But what? “Mom?” I heard James say in the darkness.

“Yes, dear,” I said, trying to keep my voice steady.

“I think we should pray.”

“Everyone pray as loud as you can,” I said.

“God needs to hear us over the tornado.” The tornado roared. The closet shook. But I could still hear the sound of voices praying, mine joining in. “Dear God, please protect us. Save us! Help me keep these children safe!” It felt like we prayed for hours.

“Miss Kim, something’s hitting me.” The top of the closet was falling in. The light fixture came loose and hit a boy in the head. Gray sky appeared above. We had to get out. The door wouldn’t open. The boys pounded on the sides of the closet, punching out a hole. I peered through the opening in the closet wall. It was hard to get my

bearings. It looked like a war zone. Could the tornado have carried us into someone else’s yard? I crawled through the hole and stepped over the inside wall of a house, then scrambled across a huge slab of siding. Part of a roof lay nearby. Where was my house? I took a few steps backward. Then it hit me. I was standing where my living room used to be. My house was gone! The bathroom closet was the only thing left standing.

A flood of panic rushed over me. The kids! I started counting. Five...six...seven. They were all there! Safe! I threw my arms around them. We held each other in a massive bear hug. I didn’t want to let go of them. I looked around the neighborhood. A house diagonal to mine was gone. Next door the roof was missing. Only half of my other neighbor’s house was standing. Then I knew once and for all, as certainly as I knew anything amidst this massive devastation, God had been there with us! That he was still with us. He must have had his arms wrapped tight around that closet!

Close Calls

I led everyone to the house across the street. The neighbors weren't home, but the tornado had torn the door off the garage. We went in to collect ourselves, glad to be somewhere with a roof.

The boys tried calling their parents on their cell phones, trying repeatedly before an occasional signal got through. The same scene played out over and over. "Mom, I'm telling the truth," they'd say. "We were in a closet. Yes, a closet. It's still there. But everything else is gone. Yes, Mom. I'm fine."

Cars couldn't get in our neighborhood. We walked to the closest boy's house. Everywhere there was destruction, but I had this sense of wonder. We were alive and safe. All of us. Like a shield had been around us. The boy's mom held him. Then she and I hugged. "You saved his life," she kept saying.

"Not me," I said. "God."

With each reunion we hugged, cried, recounted every detail from the storm. "We have some clothes and furniture you can have," one couple

said. "You need to come over for dinner," another said.

I spent the night at my sister's. James stayed with one of the boys. Leslee stayed with her friend. The next day all of the boys' families gathered at the ruins of my house. Anything that had ever mattered to me was gone. It was heartbreaking. But it was a pain I wasn't facing alone. Nearly 20 people sorted through the rubble with me, doing whatever they could.

In the weeks that followed, my newfound friends welcomed me into their lives. Through them I met even more people. I lost everything I owned, yet I'd gained something none of life's storms could take away: a community of friends and the absolute assurance that even in our darkest hour we're never alone. ©

For more on this story, see Family Room.

➔ Get more Close Calls at
guideposts.com/closecalls

An Act of **PASSION**

In 1633 a miracle saved this German village. Every 10 years since the people of Oberammergau have given thanks

By B. J. Taylor
HUNTINGTON BEACH, CALIFORNIA

I got the call in October. A man and woman were visiting from a place called Oberammergau, a German village of only 5,200 people in the Bavarian Alps. They were actors, the caller said, in a huge amateur theater production to be staged in the summer and fall of 2010, a passion play. Would I be interested in speaking with them and writing about the play? I hesitated. German com-

munity theater? All amateur actors? Maybe, if I wasn't so busy. The caller was insistent. "It's a big deal," he kept saying.

"Let me get back to you," I stalled.

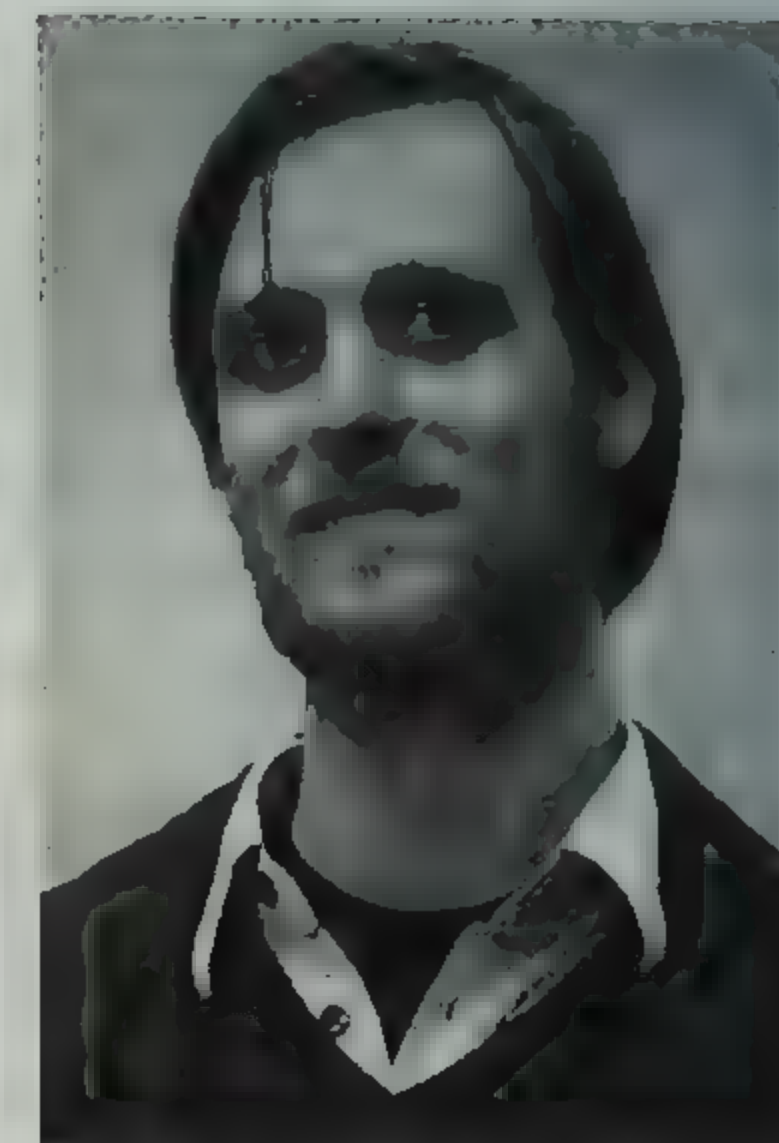
A few clicks on my computer and I was in Bavaria, best known for oompah bands and Oktoberfest. The name of the village, I learned, was pronounced OH-burr-am-er-gow. A few clicks more and I began reading a tale hundreds of years old: It was 1633. Germany was entrenched in war and pestilence. In Oberammergau, nearly 100 people had died from the plague. The entire village gathered in prayer, pleading for their lives. In return, they pledged to re-enact the life and suffering of Jesus every 10 years. Presumably, God heard their prayers. Not another life was lost to the plague. The next year the village came together again to perform its first passion play. And the people of Oberammergau have kept their promise for 376 years! I looked down at my notepad. I had filled it with questions. I hoped it wasn't too late to meet the actors.

Places We Love

The next day I found myself sitting across from Jesus and Mary Magdalene. Back home in Germany, they're better known as Frederik Mayet, a 30-year-old publicist, and Eva-Maria Reiser, a 25-year-old flight attendant. His light brown hair touched his shoulders. A neatly trimmed moustache and beard framed a warm smile. Her hair was pulled back. Neither had cut their hair since Ash Wednesday the previous February—a requirement for the actors. Men aren't allowed to trim their beards. An exception is made for Jesus, Frederik said.

At first it was hard to imagine Frederik as the King of Kings. In his polo shirt he could've passed for a surfer. I peered into his eyes. He seemed so youthful and a bit nervous. Then I remembered: Jesus began his ministry at the same age. He too had been young, just starting out. I'd never thought of Jesus being unsure of himself.

That's the magic of Oberammergau, Frederik said. Watching untrained actors, all from the village, the audience feels a connection. The an-



ROLES OF THEIR LIVES Eva-Maria Reiser plays Mary Magdalene and Frederik Mayet plays Jesus in the 2010 Oberammergau Passion Play.

ger of the mob, the anguish of Jesus, the fear of the disciples become real. "What we do onstage jumps to the audience," Frederik said. "We touch them. Their belief is strengthened. They see new aspects to the story and come away with a deeper understanding."

I felt myself moving to the edge of my seat as he and Eva-Maria spoke. It was clear they weren't

Places We Love

professional actors. They didn't overwhelm me with star power. Yet they had an unmistakable confidence, mixed with a humble purposefulness. This was something more than just a production. They were keepers of a treasure passed down through generations of townsfolk, a great, historical act of gratitude.

Excitedly, they told me about the play, how it includes 50 live animals, a chorus of 100, accompanied by an orchestra. It takes half the village to pull it off, either as a cast member—the stage is sometimes crowded with 1,000 performers—or in one of the 1,400 behind-the-scenes jobs. Everything about it seemed epic. The performance, all in German, runs for five hours with a three-hour break for dinner. It's a combination of the reenactment of Christ's last days, choral works and tableaux from the Old Testament, meant to show the connections between the Old and New Testaments. More than 500,000 people will travel to Oberammergau to watch this year's performances, about a third from the U.S.

I thought about the volunteer events I've been involved in, how much work goes into them. How do the villagers do it? "It's a crazy time, but a very nice time," Eva-Maria said. "It draws everyone together. You meet so many new people, new friends." The more they talked, the more I got a sense for how deeply the Passion is embedded in the fabric of Oberammergau. It sustains the community—financially, socially, spiritually. Families celebrate it together decade after decade, watching as roles are passed down through generations. Spouses recall how they met during rehearsals. The blessings from those prayers said centuries ago are still being counted.

Rehearsals start in November. Actors practice for five and a half months, five days a week, late into the evening after they get off work. They do little else but work, sleep, eat and rehearse. But it's exhilarating, they said. "We rehearse together, talk about it together, laugh together and discuss together," Frederik said. Slowly, they find themselves taking on the emotions of their

Places We Love

characters, understanding them, becoming them.


When the play opens May 15, the transformation must be complete. That night, the audience needs to feel it's there when Jesus faces Pilate, terrified by the intensity of 1,000 people shouting, "Crucify him!"

The challenge for the actors, Frederik said, is physical as well as emotional. As Jesus, he'll hang on the cross for 20 minutes. Even with the support of a harness, it will be exhausting. But conveying Christ's mental toil, he said, will be even tougher. He talked of the scene when Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane. "You realize how human he was," Frederik said. "He was afraid. He sweats blood because he doesn't know where to go. Then he says, 'I know my way is the way of the Father.' And he goes his way. That's the key scene in the play for me."

Before my eyes Frederik became Jesus. I could see him in his robe. His eyes, I hadn't realized how piercing they were. I wanted to reach out to him. Then the interview was over. Others were wait-

ing their turn. We shook hands and parted ways. I couldn't get Frederik and Eva-Maria out of my mind. It was as if they'd started telling me an incredible story, then stopped just when it got interesting. It's a story I know well, yet it felt as if there was something more to learn. I knew where I had to go. It might be 10 years before I'd get there, but I was bound for Oberammergau. @

For more on this story, see Family Room.

 **OBERAMMERGAU SLIDESHOW**
See more of the powerful scenes
from the famous passion play at
guideposts.com/oberammergau

Test of **STRENGTH**

**How I almost didn't survive
being on *Survivor***

By Russell Swan, GLENSIDE, PENNSYLVANIA

Russell, you with us? Talk to me, Russell.
Wake up, mate."

A voice I didn't recognize floated toward me from a long way away. I lay on my back in a muddy jungle clearing trying to sort out my thoughts. An oxygen mask covered my nose and mouth.

The voice spoke again. "I don't feel comfortable keeping him in. Not with his heart doing what it's doing."

I squinted. Jeff Probst, host of the TV show



HIGH ACHIEVER Russell, on the set of *Survivor* in Samoa

Survivor, stared down at me, his anxious face shaded by a baseball cap. That's when it hit me what was happening. I was a *Survivor* contestant and I'd just blacked out during one of the show's grueling physical challenges. Two medics crouched beside me taking my blood pressure. My mind moved slowly, but I knew I had to try to speak and stop Jeff from saying what he was about to say. I lifted my head.

Jeff knelt and looked in my eyes. "Just so you're clear on what's happening, Russell, we're going to have to pull you out of the game."

Finally my mouth worked. "Man, come on," I protested. But it was too late. My dream, the chance I'd prayed for, my whole sense of myself and God—everything I thought I knew—was evaporating before my eyes. I tried to put on the brakes, tried to tell Jeff I was just dehydrated after 15 days scraping by in the Samoan jungle.

Jeff was compassionate but unwavering. "Russell, I watched you black out in front of me two times," he said. "There's no way you could have

stayed in this game." He stepped back. The medics wrapped up their work. I lay my head back in the mud and wept.

I remember like it was yesterday the first time I saw *Survivor* 10 years ago. I was channel surfing one night. Suddenly I came across the weirdest show. A bunch of people stranded on some tropical island competing for a one-million-dollar prize. Contestants started with nothing, just the clothes on their backs and a few primitive tools. They had to find food, water, shelter. At the end of each episode one contestant got voted off the island, usually because he or she wasn't making the grade in some way. It was like that book *Lord of the Flies*. Except *Lord of the Flies* is fiction. These were real people. People like me. I didn't know why at first, but I was hooked. I watched every episode.

Don't get me wrong. I'm no couch potato. I'm an environmental lawyer. It's my dream job, what I've wanted to do ever since I watched raw sewage dump into my favorite childhood fishing hole.

Faith & Living

My wife, Caroline, and I have a spirited six-year-old daughter, Nilah. I don't spend much time in front of the TV. In fact, *Survivor* appealed to me because of all the ways it connected with my active life. I was an only child raised by parents who divorced when I was a teenager. (They later got back together and remarried, but that's a different story.) I've been a self-sufficient high achiever my whole life. *Survivor* seemed like the ultimate challenge for a guy like me, physically, mentally, spiritually. I couldn't stop wondering what I'd do in an extreme situation like that. It became my measurement of who I was as a man.

I applied to be a contestant nine times. Imagine my surprise that ninth time when a *Survivor* producer called my cell phone and said, "Russell, pack your bags. You're going to Samoa." I took it as a sign from God. He wanted this for me as much as I did. Caroline? She was just as enthusiastic. She knew this was a dream I'd had for years.

I packed, kissed Caroline and Nilah goodbye and boarded a plane for Los Angeles. The min-

ute I touched down the show took over my life. A producer escorted me to a hotel where my luggage was confiscated and I was stuck in a room with no cell phone and no television. (I was told I'd get my luggage back when filming ended in two months.) I endured long days until I was taken back to the airport and put on a plane for Samoa. Only then did I meet my fellow contestants and see the isolated jungle landscape where we'd be fending for ourselves for the next six weeks. It was mud, trees, vines and tropical beaches as far as the eye could see.

From the show's base camp we were taken by rowboats to the start of the game, a sandy beach backed by jungle. There we divided into two "tribes" of 10 and trekked into the trees, where we had to find food and water and build shelters with nothing but our bare hands. Cameramen followed us everywhere. Each day our foraging was interrupted by physical challenges devised by the producers—tests of strength, endurance and resourcefulness. It was exhausting, especially since

Faith & Living

we found almost no food. Some days I was lucky if I got some papaya or coconut. I tried to stay strong. I was even elected my tribe's leader. But as we neared the end of our second week I knew my body was flagging.

Our tenth night in the jungle it began to rain. Tropical torrents inundated our camp, dousing the fire we'd been using to boil the island's undrinkable water. Rain fell all night, all day and into the next night. We slept in mud. The morning of the fifteenth day the rain finally let up and the sun came out boiling hot. We were exhausted, starving, parched. Whatever excitement had kept me going at first was long gone. I missed Caroline and Nilah like crazy.

But this was *Survivor* and we had a challenge to complete. A member of each tribe was put inside a giant hollow ball constructed of sticks. Two other tribe members had to roll the ball blindfolded through the jungle to a clearing, with the person inside the ball calling out directions. At the clearing four blindfolded contestants had to move

another, smaller ball through a maze on top of a tilting table. My tribe put our lightest member inside the ball and I volunteered to be blindfolded. All the way through the jungle I felt the previous days' lack of water, but I shrugged it off. *This is what you came here for, Russell, where you asked God to send you*, I told myself. *Time to show what you're made of.*

By the time we reached the clearing I was woozy, but still I pressed on. We halted and I felt my way toward the tabletop maze. I stumbled. "Hold on," I mumbled. My hands found the maze and gripped a corner of the table. My head spun inside my blindfold. I heard my teammates call out to me, but for some reason I couldn't respond. The voices blended and...next thing I knew I was flat on my back, the medics bent over me.

The tears that started when Jeff Probst walked away quickly dried up. Now I was angry. This was *not* part of the plan. If God really had given me this opportunity—and I knew he had, how else could I explain being selected out of thousands of

Faith & Living

applicants after all those years trying?—then why would he let me fail now? It wasn't fair! It made no sense.

I let my head flop back into the mud and stared into the sky. The blue was intense, somehow brighter after those endless days of rain. I thought of the strange beauty of this island, the untouched beaches, the coral reefs I'd seen on swimming challenges, the black volcanic rock, the clear, warm ocean. It was God's handiwork, all right. He'd sculpted this island and somehow he'd directed my steps here. I closed my eyes. A breeze stirred the trees. What if God had sent me here for some other reason? Not to prove myself but to learn something else? Was there somehow a lesson in failure? Was *that* the reason?

The instant I asked the question I knew the answer. I'd become so obsessed with this television show and so caught up with the idea of winning that I'd forgotten what actually makes me a man. Or I should say *who* makes me. Lying there in that mud, defeated, I saw my utter depen-

dence on God as clearly as the blue Samoan sky. I could have felt bad it took this strange adventure to teach me that. But at that moment all I felt was peace. I was escorted back to base camp and treated for dehydration. I remained on the island until the show finished filming, then I flew home healthy and even crazier with impatience to see Caroline and Nilah.

A year later I'm still feeling the blessing of that blackout. I could have died that day on *Survivor*. Since then I treasure every moment of life, every moment with my family. People have written from all over saying how inspired they were by what happened to me. Can you believe it? Inspired by defeat! I believe it. I learned that day in the jungle that in God's eyes we're all survivors. Sometimes we just have to learn to lean on him to figure that out. ☺

For more on this story, see Family Room.

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Soup Kitchen **GOURMETS**

The homeless in our city needed more than just a hot meal

By Libby Birky, DENVER, COLORADO

Lunch hour is crazy at SAME Café, the 40-seat restaurant my husband, Brad, and I run in Denver. Between cooking, serving, chatting with regulars and overseeing our staff, I hardly get a chance to eat. One day a woman in her fifties dressed in a business outfit strode in. "Hi, Libby," she said.

I did a double take. *Wow, she's come a long way.* The first time she came to the café almost two years ago, she didn't have money to pay for



HOPE SERVED DAILY Folks like what Brad and Libby's café stands for: So All May Eat.

Communities in Action

a meal. No problem. Like many customers, she volunteered to work. After a bowl of Brad's white bean spinach soup and a slice of apple, pecan and bleu cheese pizza, she washed dishes and swept. *Look at her now.* I stole a glance at Brad, in the kitchen. Wasn't this what we'd hoped for?

In 2003, on a flight home from Texas, we'd hatched this crazy dream. I was a teacher and Brad worked in IT. We'd both done a lot of volunteering at soup kitchens. It was something we felt called to do, feeding the poor. If only it weren't so dispiriting at times. "Remember the creamed peas we had to make?" I asked Brad. Big industrial cans of peas we mixed with flour—the end result looked like wallpaper paste. Probably tasted like it too. The guests didn't seem any more inspired than we were. They sat at tables eating off of trays, nobody saying a word. "I wish we could start our own place."

"Why don't we?" Brad said. "Something more like a restaurant where people wouldn't mind hanging out."

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We started jotting down ideas, me on a cocktail napkin, Brad in the margin of a magazine. "We'll have a menu," I said.

"Healthy food, fresh organic vegetables," Brad added. He was the cook in our house, and a good one too.

"No cash register," I said. "Just a donation box on the counter."

It would be a charity, but we didn't want our diners to think of it as a charity. "If a customer can't pay," Brad said, "he can help wash dishes or mop the floor."

Brad signed up for culinary classes at night and I began looking for possible venues. Right away we hit hurdles. "There's no such thing as a free lunch," one potential landlord sniffed. "You seem like nice kids, but you're crazy to think this will ever work." I met with brokers, contractors and suppliers, only to watch them walk away, shaking their heads. Was our idea that unrealistic? *Lord, you're going to have to clear the way here. We can't do this on our own.*

Communities in Action

No bank would lend us the money to open a restaurant with no cash register. The only way we could get funds was to cash in thirty thousand dollars from our IRA—almost everything we had.

“Maybe we should just forget about this,” I said to Brad one night.

“Libby, this is something we believe in. We’ve gotta do it.”

Finally, a landlord agreed to lease us space on Colfax Street. We put flyers around the neighborhood, asked friends to spread the word, and held our breath.

Our first customer was a woman in her forties. She told me she was recently divorced and she and her two kids had no place of their own. “Could I have a salad?” she asked. I brought her a plate of greens with fresh fruit and nuts. Her eyes grew wide. “These are the first fresh vegetables I’ve had in four months,” she exclaimed. That alone made our struggles to open the café worth it.

Word traveled fast, thanks to stories in the papers and on TV. Soon we had more than 50

customers a day. “What do I owe you?” one patron asked.

“Whatever you think the meal’s worth,” I said, “whatever you can afford.” A few ate without paying or donating an hour of work. But most gave what they could, even if it was just a dollar. At first Brad and I kept our day jobs. It was the only way to make ends meet. Then a funny thing happened. People from all walks of life started coming: lawyers, doctors, architects. They came for Brad’s cooking. But they also liked what our café stood for. SAME is an acronym. It’s short for our credo: So All May Eat. Those with money gave, and then some. One of our customers left a check for five hundred dollars. Another bought one thousand dollars in gift certificates. Still another donated a truck so we could haul produce from organic suppliers. Eventually we were able to quit our day jobs and work full-time at the restaurant.

Our dream is coming true. We serve healthy food to people in need. We treat everyone with dignity. We hoped to develop a sense of commu-

Communities in Action

nity—the feeling that God had drawn us together, the comfortable and the poor, so that we might help one another. The woman in business attire was one of them.

Something was different about her that day. Something besides her outfit. She stopped at the counter and ordered greens with sun-dried tomatoes and goat cheese, and a ham and pineapple pizza. “I have something to tell you,” she said. “The last time I was here, I started talking to a woman I’d met here before. She said, ‘There’s an opening in my office. Why don’t you come in and apply?’ I did—I got the job!” I knew what was different about her—confidence. Hope.

“I’m so happy for you,” I said.

She opened her purse. “I can pay now.” “How can I ever thank you?”

“You just did,” I said. ©

Curried Carrot Soup

All fresh ingredients!

- 1 large onion, diced
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 teaspoon orange zest
- 1 tablespoon mild yellow curry powder
- 2 pounds carrots, peeled and diced
- 1 quart vegetable stock

Salt

Freshly ground black pepper

In a large saucepan, sauté onion in olive oil till translucent. Add orange zest, curry powder and carrots. Sauté till carrots are tender. Add veggie stock and puree with an immersion blender. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serves 8-10.

The Big Taco REUNION

**Would I ever taste food like
my mom's again?**

**By Karen Hessen
FOREST GROVE, OREGON**

Mother wasn't a good cook. She was a *great* cook! She was of German heritage, but hands down, her favorite cuisine was Mexican. She grew up in Colorado and moved to San Diego after she married Daddy. There's no doubt the amazing Mexican restaurants in town inspired her. Enchiladas were her signature dish for our church's fund-raisers, and her salsa—a recipe from a neighbor who

grew her own tomatillos and cilantro—was out of this world. But nothing got her going in the kitchen more than making tacos. Mother's, overflowing with lettuce, tomato and onion, simply couldn't be beat. In fact, it was those tacos, many years later, that would bring my family close after a difficult time.

I was preschool age when my older sister, Amy, and I first followed Mother to the kitchen, huddling close while she made her specialty. Instead of browning the meat first, she'd use her hands to spread some over each tortilla. Then she'd fry each one meat-side up, fold it in half and fry it again on each side. Occasionally Mother handed me a spoon. "Karen Rae, it's your turn." Carefully, I'd drop the meat on a tortilla, pushing it to the edges with my tiny hands, trying to get it just right. "You're going to be a great cook when you grow up," Mother would say proudly.

Right before dinnertime, I'd help Mother grate and chop the cheese, lettuce, tomato and onion, put them in dishes and set them on the table.

Comfort Food

"Thank you, God, for this food," Mother would say before Amy and I grabbed a taco.

Nearly all of our extended family lived in the same county, and there was no better way to celebrate birthdays and special occasions than over Mother's tacos. One of my cousins, Lee, liked them as much as I did. He and I really bonded over the years. Actually, those family meals kept all of us—cousins, aunts and uncles—connected. For a time, at least.

We kids grew up and left San Diego—I moved to Oregon. Amy moved to Oregon too, but several hours away, and Lee to northern California. We stopped having those big family get-togethers. You can probably guess what became a staple on our menu when my husband Douglas and I married. Tacos, Mother's way. "These are as tasty as your mother's," Douglas said. But to me, nothing could compare to hers.

Through the years, it wasn't just physical distance that separated Amy and me. I'm not sure how it started, but we argued over everything.

Those misunderstandings got between me and family members who were close with Amy—even Lee. "You're sisters; why can't you forgive each other?" Mother would say. "And you're not talking to your cousins either?" I know our estrangement hurt her. Truth be told, I felt like I was letting God down too. *Lord, I prayed, help me make things right with my family.* I daydreamed about somehow getting us together for one of Mother's taco dinners just like old times. But I didn't get a chance. Last May, Mother died.

My grief was compounded by guilt. Why hadn't I tried harder to mend fences with my sister and cousins? I could have given Mother the joy of one last family reunion! Now that wouldn't happen. Still, slowly, Amy and I reached out to each other. Life was too fleeting, we agreed, for spats. Time for me to patch things up with the rest of my family.

The first person I needed to see was Lee. I called him. Our conversation was awkward, but he said he was up for company. Douglas and I drove to his

Comfort Food

home in California. "I'm sorry we drifted apart," I said, hugging Lee. Soon it was like we were kids again. We talked all afternoon.

"I'm heading over to my son's for dinner. Why don't you join me?" Lee said. I hadn't seen Matt since he was three. Matt's wife led us into their kitchen. I couldn't believe it. There were tacos lined up on the counter, waiting to be fried. Not just any tacos. The meat was flattened on each tortilla and spread out to the edges. These were Mother's tacos!

"How did you learn to make tacos this way?" I asked Matt.

"I just know that's the way tacos are made in our family," he said. Our family. Those words never meant more to me. I knew Mother would be proud. ©

➔ Find more great stories and recipes at guideposts.com/foodandrecipes

Tasty Tacos

A delicious way to bring your family together.

1½ pounds lean ground beef

12 corn tortillas

Vegetable oil

½ head of lettuce, shredded

½ onion, chopped

2 tomatoes, chopped

8 ounces Cheddar cheese, grated

Salsa

Divide beef into 12 parts. Spread one part on each tortilla, using your hands to flatten and spread to within ½ inch of edge. Fry in hot oil by first laying meat side up. When tortilla is soft, fold in half and cook on each side till meat is thoroughly cooked. Keep warm while cooking remainder of tacos. Serve lettuce, onion, tomatoes and cheese on the side. Top with salsa. Serves 3.

WHAT PRAYER CAN DO

Miracle Ride

For months I had trained for a 100-mile benefit bike tour. I was sure everything was set. But now, only 35 miles into the ride, my back wheel had snapped a spoke. I squatted beside my bike and dropped my head. *This can't be happening, I thought. This ride is too important.*

All the money from this tour went to cancer research. Both my mom and my sister are cancer survivors. This was my way of honoring them, a salute to their courage. I had collected over two thousand dollars in pledges. I just *had* to finish!

A support vehicle drove up to give me some help, but the mechanics weren't very optimistic. "There must be something you can do," I pleaded. They twisted the spoke back into place with a spoke wrench, and I was back on the road.

I prayed as I pedaled up a long hill. My back tire wobbled and shook under me. *Let me get to the finish line.*

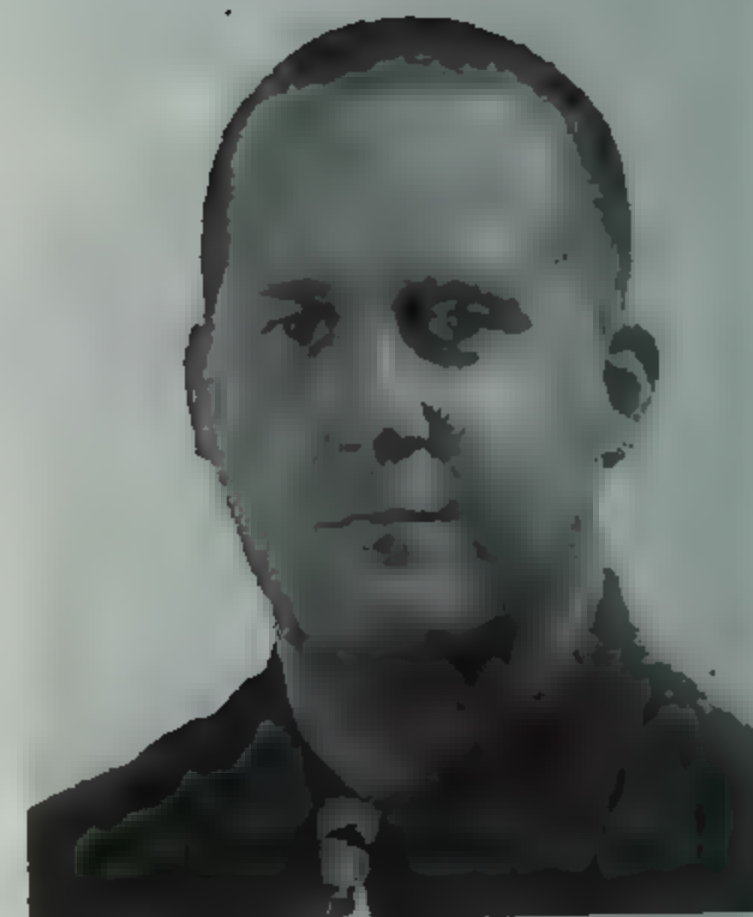
Snap! Another spoke gave out. Even I could tell there was no way to fix my back wheel this time. I sat down by the side of the road, watching hundreds of cyclists pedal by, thinking about my family waiting for me at the finish

line—a finish line I would never cross. *I've worked so hard! I thought. God, I was counting on you to get me there.*

"What's the problem?" a sandy-haired man called to me from the opposite side of the road. He was looking at my bike with interest.

"Back wheel's shot," I said.

"I have a bike like that in my garage," he said, motioning to a house just off the road. "You can have my back wheel." He set off toward the house.



Jason got his perfect finish

What Prayer Can Do

I could hardly take in what he'd said. What were the chances?

By the time he'd gotten back with the wheel, the support mechanics had arrived. They popped on the new wheel and, with a wave to my new friend, I was off and riding.

I crossed the finish line, and was engulfed in a massive family hug. I couldn't wait to tell them how close I had come to not making it, and how prayer had powered me across the finish line.

God was with me on my journey, just like he was with every cancer patient on theirs.

—Jason Haupricht
TOLEDO, OHIO

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family room

MEET THE PEOPLE IN OUR PAGES

Former Survivor: Samoa contestant **Russell Swan** faced a *Test of Strength* (page 76) after he was eliminated from the competition for severe dehydration. "At first, I was intent on winning the money, and I was disappointed to have



SWAN "Daddy-daughter time is the best," says Russell.

that chance taken away," says Russell. "But had I won a million dollars, it would be inferior to what I'm experiencing now—helping people,

Family Room

letting them know they can get up again after a devastating loss, whatever that might be. The blessings the blackout brought are much more wonderful than money." The number-one thing Russell missed while on the island: his wife, Caroline, and their daughter, Nilah. "We are big foodies, so we love to go out to eat. I'm all about the main course, but my girls love dessert—chocolate cake especially." What does Nilah think of her dad's appearance on *Survivor*? "She's seen the show, and honestly she's underwhelmed by the whole thing!" laughs Russell. "Her taste in shows and movies rules the Swan household. Right now, it's all about Disney's *The Princess and the Frog*." For more on Russell, visit twitter.com/russkid.

Friends nourish us on the deepest level," says GUIDEPOSTS roving editor **Mary Ann O'Roark** (*The Blessings of Friendship*, page 12). Mary Ann holds many friendships close to her heart, among them a 15-year bond with GUIDEPOSTS contribut-



O'ROARK Mary Ann (right) and Kitty share a timeless bond of friendship.

ing editor Kathryn 'Kitty' Slattery. "I was first drawn to Kitty's vivacious spirit," says Mary Ann. "Kitty and I live in different states, but we get together when we can. Recently, we took a two-day trip to a monastery in up-

state New York." Mary Ann says having a strong network of friends also deepens her sense of community and faith. "I pray for my friends all the time—remembering them, sending little messages of support, blessings for their families. I know in their own way they're doing the same for me." Over the years, Mary Ann has kept in touch with a number of friends thanks to her GUIDEPOSTS stories. "Friends from my childhood, college and

Family Room

even stewardess days write me lovely letters after reading my GUIDEPOSTS stories. It's been a great way to reconnect."

Mostly, I think kids want your time," says **Denise Jonas** of raising her sons Kevin, Joe and Nick of the Grammy Award-nominated band the Jonas Brothers, and their younger brother, Frankie, also a performer. Denise and her husband, Kevin, keep their family grounded even in the spotlight (*Meet the Mom*, page 22). "When the boys were little, Kevin and I tried to be students of our children. We learned what makes them individuals, and what each one needed from us." In addition to wife and mom, Denise has a new role: ambassador for iMom,



JONAS Inspiring moms everywhere

a website dedicated to providing expert ideas, support and guidance to moms who are raising kids of all ages. "I think of it as a refrigerator full of wisdom. Everything you hunger for as a mom, you can find there—like other mothers to talk to and listen to and tips for tackling parenting issues as they happen," says Denise. "It's a great place for encouragement." For the latest news on the Jonas Brothers, check out **jonasbrothers.com**. And for more of Denise's parenting advice, visit **iMom.com**.

Every 10 years the citizens of Oberammergau, a German village in the Bavarian Alps, perform their famous passion play (*An Act of Passion*, page 68). A once-in-a-decade chance arose to take a group of GUIDEPOSTS readers there to see it. So we've teamed up with Travel with Spirit to offer *The Oberammergau Passion Play Tour*. The trip, August 21-30, also includes excursions through the Imperial Cities: Budapest, Vienna and Prague, and is hosted by Guideposts

Family Room



TAYLOR Take a trip with Guideposts and you could be here, in Oberammergau!

Vice President and Editor-in-Chief Edward Grinnan. “I don’t know what I’m looking forward to more—seeing the historic passion play at Oberammergau and exploring the Bavarian Alps, or getting to spend time with GUIDEPOSTS readers,” says Edward. “In any case, I know it will be an unforgettable adventure.” And if you’d like to travel closer to home, other Guideposts editors will be hosting Inspiration Vacations to such popular destinations as Alaska, the Baha-

mas, Washington, D.C., and the live music show capital, Branson, Missouri.

GUIDEPOSTS contributing editor **Ptolemy Tompkins** (*Divine Dreams*, page 30) discusses the afterlife of pets in his new book, *The Divine Life of Animals*. He read more than 100 sources to gather information for the book, but he also tapped another resource—you! “I received scores of letters from GUIDEPOSTS readers about my article *Do Pets Go to Heaven?* (February 2005), and many of their stories are featured in the book,” he says. “If there’s one point I’d like readers to get, it’s that it is possible to believe in heaven and to believe the rest of the natural world has a place in it with us.” Ptolemy’s beloved dog Mercury passed on just as he was finishing the book. “His death reminded me that though I might have written a book full of complicated arguments, the key question the book turned around was anything but complicated.” Get your copy at **guideposts.com/divinelife**.

Family Room

Thanks to the power of prayer and one sturdy closet, **Kimmie Newton** survived a devastating tornado (*Mother Courage*, page 59). “I count my blessings every day,” says Kimmie. The tornado destroyed her home, but Kimmie and her kids, James and Leslee, are adjusting well in their new house. “We love it! And it’s just a few minutes from our old neighborhood,” she says. It’s also near Middle Tennessee State University, where Kimmie is majoring



NEWTON On-site days after the tornado

in social work. “College is an exciting place to meet people of all ages. I hope to graduate this year and work with troubled teens—something I’ve always wanted to do.” Balancing motherhood with schoolwork isn’t easy, but Kimmie says she and her kids make sure to stay connected. “We often visit a nearby horse farm and go riding together. I call it God’s country. It’s so peaceful and quiet,” she says. “And we eat dinner together every night.”

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CONTINUED...

Close Again

My son's away at college, but the physical distance is nothing compared to the emotional distance I'd felt ever since he hit his teens. I wanted us to be close again, but didn't know how to attain that. Until I read Julie Garmon's story *A New Season* (November 2009) about being ready to let her son grow up. I sent the story to my son, with a note asking, "Please read the article when you get a chance. It might help you understand me."

He called me that weekend. "I was so busy in high school trying to grow up it didn't occur to me how you were feeling." Now my son and I talk regularly. I've even passed Julie's story along to friends. They too have enjoyed sharing "a new season" with their kids.

Thank you for helping me find a way back to my son.

—**Cheryl Harms**
CRESCENT CITY, CALIFORNIA

Guideposts

GUIDEPOSTS is a monthly inspirational, interfaith, nonprofit magazine written by people from all walks of life. Its articles help readers achieve their maximum personal and spiritual potential.

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